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## ON THE WORDS FOR "FEAR" IN CERTAIN LANGUAGES. A STUDY IN LINGUISTIC PSYCHOLOGY.

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In a previous essay<sup>1</sup> the writer discussed anger-words, and reference to this will be necessary since not a few fear-words are akin to those used to denote anger.

I. *Fear*, if we trust the etymology of its English name, is "an *experience*;" Skeat tells us that the word was "originally used of the *perils* and *experiences*; of a way-faring." The Anglo-Saxon *fáer* meant "a sudden peril, danger, panic, fear;" cognate are Icelandic *fár*, "bale, harm, mischief," Old High German *fára, var*, "treason, danger, fright," Modern German *Gefahr*, "danger, peril, risk." Related also are: Latin *periculum*, "peril, trial, danger" (from *perior*, the root of *peritus*, "experienced, skilled"), *experiencia*, "experience, trial, proof;" Greek *πείρα*, "attempt, stratagem, trick," *περάω* "I go through." The common radical of all these terms is the Indo-European root *Per*, "to pass through, to travel, to *fare* (as our own English word from the same stock has it)." In Old Norse *fár* has the additional signification of "plague, pestilence, misfortune," which may go to somewhat explain our expression "a plague of fear." *Fear*, then, emphasizes "what one has *passed* through."

II. "All of a *tremble*" is a popular description of the state of fear or terror, and not a few of our fear-words contain this primitive idea. We say "*trembling, shaking, quaking* with fear," and these expressions find their analogues in many other tongues. George Fox tells us in his "Journal" that "Justice Bennet [in 1650] was the first to call us Quakers, because I bade him quake and tremble at the word of the Lord," and all over the world the "fear of the Lord" has been largely associated with *quaking* and *trembling*.

The English word *terror* (French *terreur*, Latin *terror*), goes back to the same root which gave birth to Latin *terrere* (older form, *ter-sere*), "to dread, to be afraid," and, originally, "to tremble;" Russian *triasti* (*triasate*), "to shake, to shiver;" Lithuanian *triszéti*, "to tremble;" Sanskrit *tras*, "to tremble, to be afraid," *trásā*, "terror"—the radical of all being Indo-European *ters*, "to tremble, to be afraid." Of similar meaning, ultimately are *tremor* and cognate words derived from the Latin, and the derivatives of Greek *Τρέω*, "I tremble, quake, fear, dread, am afraid of."

The German *Furcht* (the Middle High German *vorhte* signified "fear, anxiety, apprehension") is the abstract of the verb *fürchten*," cognate with Gothic *fáirhtjan*, "to fear, to be afraid of," to which is related the adjective-participle *fáihrits*, "fearful, timid," *fáirhlei*, "fear." The Teutonic radical *fork*, together, perhaps, with the roots of Latin *querquerus*, "shivering with cold," and Greek *χαρχαλψ*, "I tremble," goes back to the Indo-European *perk* or *qerk*, "to tremble." Another word embodying the same idea is Gothic *reiro*, "tremble, terror"—*reiran*, "to tremble." To "tremble like an aspen" is

<sup>1</sup> *Amer. Jour. Psychol.*, Vol. VI, pp. 585-592.

a very ancient Indo-European figure of speech. The Latin *pavor*, "quaking, trembling, throbbing with desire, joy, fear," "anxiety, fear, dread,—the god of fear is personified as *Pavor*,—to be afraid, to fear, to tremble," and the Greek Φόβος, with all the *phobias* to which it has given rise in the various civilized languages, have at their base radicals which signify "to tremble." The corresponding verbs in Greek Φοβέω and Φέβομαι are related to Sanskrit *bhī*, "fear," *bibhēti*, "he is afraid," Lithuanian *baimé*, "fear," *bijētis*, "to be afraid," *bajus*, "terrible," *baisa*, "terror," while the modern German *bebēn*, "to tremble, quake," goes back to the same Indo-European radical.

We speak in English of "shivering with terror, or fear," and it is interesting to note that in the "Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy," an English Romance *circa* 1390 A. D., we find "Achilles at the choice men *cheuert* (shivered) for anger."

The French word *craindre*, "to fear," belongs here also, being derived from the Latin *tremere*.

The radical meaning of English *shudder* is to "tremble."

III. Another closely related series of words is that in which the basal idea is *agitation*, *movement*, *stir*. Here belong the Latin *metus*, "agitation, anxiety, fear, dread, terror," *metuere*, "to fear, to be afraid of,"—allied perhaps to *mōtus*, "moved, affected, disturbed." *Trepidation*,—the Latin *trepidatio* signified "confused hurry, alarm, consternation, terror, trepidation,"—has a curious etymology. Festus, the ancient grammarian, glosses the old Latin *trepit* by *uerit*, adding the remark "unde *trepidus* et *trepidatio*, quia turbatione mens *uerit*atur." The Latin adjective *trepidus*, "trembling, alarmed, fearful, anxious," etc., would then seem to signify "in a state of disturbance, as if the mind is being continually *turned* about or agitated (Skeat)." The Old Latin *trepere* is cognate with Greek Τρέπειν, "to turn," and also with Latin *torquere* (whence *torture*), the basis of all being the Indo-European radical *t-rk*, "to turn, to twist." So when we speak of being *tortured* by our fears we are but repeating a very old figure of speech. A coward we often say "writhes with fear."

IV. A common expression in English is "to start with fear," with which may be compared the colloquial "to almost jump out of one's boots;" we have also the derivative "to startle." The same idea is at the basis of the modern High German *Schreck*, "terror, fright, fear, horror," the Old High German verb *scrēckōn* signifying, "to start up, to leap, to hop," the Middle High German substantive *schric*, "a sudden start, terror," and the causative verb *schrecken*, "to cause to start, to make afraid." The radical is *skrik*, "to leap, to move suddenly, to start."

A cognate idea resides in the Modern German *sich entsetzen*, "to be startled at, to be terrified, to shudder," and the substantive *Entsetzen*, "terror, dread, horror, fright." The Middle High German *entsetzen* signified, "to cast down, to disconcert, to fear, to be afraid of," the Old High German *intszissen* (there is also a M. H. G. from *entsitzen*), "to come out of one's seat, to lose one's composure, to fear, to be afraid of." In Gothic we find *andasēts*, "horrible," *andasitan*, "to be terrified." These words are all based upon the Indo-European root *sed*, "to sit," with a privative, or disjunctive prefix (Mod. German *ent*, Gothic *and*). The idea at the root of *Entsetzen*, is "starting from one's seat in terror."

V. The sinking of the heart and of the vital organs generally is a familiar conception of "fear" among primitive peoples, and one which appears very often in picture-writing and sign-language, as Col. Mallery has pointed out. Our own language furnishes cognate expressions, "to have one's heart in one's boots," "to feel one's

heart sink," etc. Being "down-hearted" is thus a very early form of fear.

Perhaps, here belong also the Yoruba (a West African language) *ai ya fö mi*, "I am afraid," literally, "the heart jumps me," *daiyafö*, "to frighten," etc., although the jumping is here the other way. We say, analogously, in English "my heart leaped into my mouth," in speaking of certain aspects of fear.

VI. The ghost in "Hamlet" describes several of the known symptoms of fear:

"I could a tale unfold, whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,  
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,  
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,  
And each particular hair to stand on end,  
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine."

The last mentioned symptom is illustrated by the etymology of the word *horror*. The Latin *horror*, "a standing on end, bristling, terror, dread," and *horreere*, "to stand erect, to bristle, to be afraid, astonished, amazed, to startle with fear," etc., as the older form (*horsere*) of the verb (cf. *hirsutus*, "rough, hairy, shaggy") shows, refer to the "bristling of the hair in fear." In Sanskrit *hirsh*, "to bristle," is said of the hair, "especially as a token of anger or pleasure" (Skeat).

Virgil refers to the bristling of the hair in the *Aen.*, II, 774: *Obstupui, steteruntque comæ, et vox faucibus hæsit.*

VII. The "freezing of the blood" finds cognate expression in some of our fear-words, and besides we speak often enough of "the cold shivers" of fear, and "the cold sweat" that accompanies it. Our English *afraid* is the past participle of the verb *affray* "to frighten," which Skeat traces through the Old French *effreier* (*effraier, esfreér*), "to frighten," to a Low Latin *exfrigidare* (from *frigus*, "cold"), "to freeze with terror,"—in Latin *frigidus* meant "dead or stiffened with cold or fright," and Horace even uses it in the sense of "fearful." A common phrase in English is "numbed with fear."

VIII. Our English *dismay*, "to terrify, to discourage," comes, according to the Skeat, from Old French *dismayer* (cf. Spanish *desmayar*, "to dismay, to dishearten, to be discouraged, to lose heart"), which seems to have been supplanted very early by the verb *esmayer*, "to dismay, to terrify, to strike powerless"—the intransitive sense of which "to lose power, to faint, to be discouraged," would appear to be the older. *Desmayer* and *esmayer*, according to the best authorities, are derived from the Old High German *magan* (Mod. Germ. *mögen*, Mod. Engl. *may*), with the Latin prefixes *dis-*, *ex-*. The "loss of power" is the basal idea here. From Old French *esmayer* comes Modern French *émoi*, "fright, terror." Cognate also is the Italian *smagare*, "to lose courage." The English word *misgiving* has somewhat of the idea in *dismay*. With us, in English "to lose heart" is "to give way to fear."

IX. The Latin *consternatio* (whence our *consternation*), signified "consternation, fright, tumult;" the corresponding verb is *consternare*, "to stretch on the ground, to prostrate, to terrify, to alarm, to dismay"—the participle *consternatus* meaning "cast down, prostrate, frightened." The basal idea is seen in Latin *sternere*, "to throw down, to throw to the ground," from the Indo-European radical *st-r*, "to spread out." We employ a somewhat similar figure when we speak of "abject fear."

X. We often speak of persons being "rooted to the ground with

fear," "transfixed with fear," etc.; from fright people often stand "stock still." In Gothic we find *usgaisjan*, "to terrify," *usgeisnan*, "to be terrified," cognate with Old Norse *geiska-fullr*, "filled with terror," and Lithuanian *gāszti*, "to swoon." Related also is the Latin *h̄erere* (older form *h̄esere*), "to cling to, to stick, to be unable to move away"—the radical of the whole series being Indo-European *ghais*, "to stick." We still say of a valiant man that "he will not stick at anything."